

1608/4561

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THE
B R I T I S H
ACADEMY:
BEING A
New-Erected SOCIETY
FOR THE
Advancement of Wit
and Learning:
WITH
Some few OBSERVATIONS
upon it.

—*Hæ Tibi erunt Artes: Pacisq; imponere
Morem.* Virgil.

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T H E

British Academy, &c.

SUCH is our Case at present, that if we have a Mind to be agreeably entertain'd with the State of our own Affairs, we must look into Foreign Papers, rather than into those that are publish'd here by Authority; and therefore I often read the *Dutch Prints* with the same Eagerness and Pleasure, as the *French at Paris* read the *Post-Boy*. If we have no good News for Our selves here, we may sometimes find some from *Holland*; and what is good, is so rare, that I had rather have it from any Place, than not at all. I was so delighted with the following Paragraph in the *Amsterdam Gazette* of the 20th of *May 1712. N.S.* that I cou'd not help transcribing, and turning it into *English*, that such Comfortable Tidings to *Men of Obscure Merit*, might be convey'd all over the Nation: And I shall endeavour to prove, that the Design there mention'd, is much likelier to succeed in *England*, than ever it was in *France*.

The Words of the *Dutch Gazette* are as follows, in the Article from *London*.

Il s'est formé ici depuis peu une Société pour recompenser & encourager le Mérite, par report aux beaux Arts. Elle doit être composée de 21 Membres, dont il y en a déjà 19 d'Arretez savoir les Dues de Beaufort & d'Ormond ; les Comites d'Arran & d'Orrery ; les Lords Duplin, Gendre du Grand Tresorier ; Harley, Fils dudit Tresorier ; Lansdowne, Secrétaire des Guerres ; Masham & Bathurst : les Chevalier Windham : Messieurs St. Jean, Secrétaire d'Etat : Harcourt Fils du Garde des Seaux ; Raymond Solliciteur-General ; les Colonels Hill & Desney ; Swif, Docteur en Theologie ; Prior Arbuthnott, Medicin de la Reine ; & Friend, Medicin du Due d'Ormond. Ces Messieurs, qui ont réservé de Nommer les Deux autres, Membres lors qu'ils le jugeront à propos, s'assemblant tous les Jeudis, & ont déjà fait des gratifications à quelques Auteurs dont les ouvrages ont été goûtez, & recommandé d'autres aux Ministres d'Etat pour avoir quelque Etablissement.

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There has been lately form'd here a Society to Reward and Encourage Merit, with respect to the Liberal Arts and Sciences. It is to be composed of 21 Members, of which Number there are already 19 chosen : That is to say, The Dukes of *Beaufort* and *Ormond* ; the Earls of *Arran* and *Orrory* ; the Lords *Duplin*, Son-in-Law of the Great Treasurer ; *Harley*, Son of the said Treasurer ; *Lansdown*, Secretary of War ; *Masham* and *Bathurst* ; Sir *W. Windham* ; Mr. *St. John*, Secretary of State ; *Harcourt*, Son of the Lord Keeper ; and *Raymond*, Sollicitor-General : The Colonels *Hill* and *Desney* ; *Swift*, Doctor of Divinity ; *Prior*, *Arbuthnott* the Queen's Physician ; and *Friend*, Physician to the Duke of *Ormond*. These Gentlemen who have defer'd naming the other Two Members till such time as they think fit, do now assemble every *Thursday*, and have already given Rewards to some Authors, whose Works have been approved of, and have recommended Others to the Ministers of State, that they may have some Establishment.

This Fact being thus fairly related, the Reader is desired to observe, That it was in the Year 1629, under the single Ministry of Cardinal *Richlieu*, when a Society of such great Wits was first form'd at *Paris*; which was soon after establish'd, by an Edict of the King, with the Style and Title of the *French Academy*. And it is left to be determin'd by all Judicious Readers, whether this *British Seminary* of Wit and Learning is not a Copy of that Renown'd Society in *France*; and whether the Design and Model of it has not been approved of there, since our happy Correspondence with that Ingenious Nation.

The *French Society* consisted only at their first Meeting, of Seven or Eight Men of Letters, who met together to talk about their Books and Writings: And it was some time before Monsieur *Servien*, Secretary of State, and other Persons, distinguish'd by their Condition, as well as by their Merit, were added to the Company. But here we see the *British Society*, at the very first Formation of it, is compos'd of no less than Two Dukes, not only capable of Rewarding, but of Judging, as well as of Writing: And likewise of

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Two Earls ; Five Lords ; One Knight ; One Secretary of State ; Two Colonels of Foot, and One Squire : Not to mention the Lawyer ; the Doctors ; the Religious Priest ; and the Poet. What therefore may we not expect from the future Progress of this Society, which sets out with so much greater Lustre, than that of its Original at *Paris* ; so famous now all over *Europe*.

The Great End and Business of the *French Academy*, was to correct and refine their Language, as may be seen at large in the History of that Academy, written by Monsieur *Pelisson* : And we have already a Proposal, publish'd the 17th of May 1712, for *Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue, in a Letter to the most Honourable Robert Earl of Oxford and Mortimer, Lord High Treasurer of Great Britain : By Jonathan Swift, D. D.*

Louis, King of *France*, by Letters Patents, in the Year 1635, having mention'd the Great Things done for the Glory and Embellishment of *France*, by his dearly-belov'd Cousin the Cardinal *Richlieu*, His Principal Minister of State, gives that Minister Power and Authority to call himself the Chief, and the Protector of the *French Academy*

Academy : And doubtless the Scheme of this *British* Academy is form'd with a View no less Glorious ; That the Great and Memorable Actions of this *Minister* ; the mighty Things perform'd for the Allies and the Common Cause ; the vast Successes against the Enemy ; and, above all, the Restoring of Credit, and Paying the Publick Debts, may be fairly transmitted to Posterity.

That this is the chief Design of our new *Erected Society*, is plainly insinuated by the Author of the Letter before mentioned ; for which the Reader may please to see his own Words : *If Things go on*, says he, *at the present Rate*, (that is , if our Language be not corrected, improved, and ascertain'd,) *all I can promise your Lordship, is, That about Two hundred Years hence some painful Compiler*, who will be at the Trouble of studying old Language, *may inform the World, that in the Reign of Queen ANNE, ROBERT Earl of OXFORD, a very Wise and Excellent Man, was made High Treasurer, and saved his Countrey.* [Mark those last Words , pray , as you go along.] *Thus much he may be able to pick out, and willing to transfer into his New History ; but the rest of your Character which I, or any other Writer, may value our selves*

selves by drawing : And the Particular Account of the great Things, done under your Ministry, for which you are already so Celebrated in most Parts of Europe, will probably be dropt. So far that Author : But I cannot help differing with him in one Particular : For I am firmly of Opinion, that altho our Language should happen not to be improved or ascertain'd, yet the great Things done by that *very Wise and Excellent Man*, will not so easily be forgotten ; nor the rest of his Character be dropt, for which he is already so celebrated in most Parts of Europe.

Besides, as there seems to be an Exact Agreement between the intended Protector of this Society, and that of the *French Academy* in its Infancy, there can be no Doubt but the great Work will be carried on after much the same Manner, and under the same Statutes and Regulations. And it appears in Monsieur *Pelisson's* History of the *French Academy*, That every Member of it, both Present and Future, Friend or Foe, was oblig'd in Gratitude to their Protector, to *revere his Virtue and his Memory*. The *British* Academicians being therefore under the same Obligation, how is it possible that their Protector's *Vertue or Memory* should ever be forgotten ?

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And there is one considerable Advantage, which our New Academy will have above the *French*. For it appears by the History just mention'd, that after the *French* King had given his Consent, that his dear Cousin should be Chief of the Academy, the Parliament could not for a long while be brought to confirm the Patent. And Monsieur *Pelisson* gives the Reasons of it. *Cardinal Richlieu*, says he, *having carried the Royal Authority a great deal higher than any one had done before him*; *tho belov'd by some, was envy'd by others, hated and detested by many, fear'd and dreaded by all*. *His Creatures*, continues he, *talk'd of this Design with excessive Encomiums*. Never, said they, were the past Ages possest of so much Eloquence as ours is like to be. *We shall outdo all that went before us, and all that shall come after*. And the greatest Share of the Glory will redound to the Academy and the *Cardinal*. Others, on the contrary, treated this Design as ridiculous. They accused the Academy as aiming to give Laws to Things not susceptible of them, and were perpetually falling upon them with Jests and Satyrs. *Distrustful People could not tell but there might be a Snake in the Grass*; and were afraid the establishing this Society would be a new Support of his Domination, that they were only his

his Pensioners, maintain'd by him to justify all his Actions, and make Observations on those of others. These were the Difficulties in France : But our New Society need fear no such Opposition as the Frenchmen found from their Parliament of Paris. Our Parliament will most certainly be as forward to pass an Act in Favour of them and their Protector, as they have been to do so many great Things already for him and the Nation, and even to pass a Vote in his Praise. Besides, there is no Body can pretend that *he has ever carried the Royal Authority higher than any one had done before him* ; nor can it be imagin'd that he has a thousandth Part of the Enemies that Cardinal Richlieu had : And I am fully persuad'd, that all Things being consider'd, both at Home and Abroad, there is not a Man in the World that *envies him*. And tho he has been suspected to *maintain Pensioners to justify his own Actions, and make Observations on those of others* ; yet, whoever will look carefully over the List of the Members, must needs acquit him of that Calumny, and confess, that he who pick'd out such a Set of *Wits and Patrons*, could have no such base Thoughts in his Head.

When the French Academy had settled their Statutes, the next Thing they did was

was to get a Seal. And what was the Impression? Why, only their Protectors Picture; not engrav'd like a *Seneca's Head*, but drawn at length with a modest Word on the Reverse. *To Immortality.* Something like this may be very easily done here. But I am not for putting on the Reverse, *the Bill for the Protestant Succession*; tho it may be seen in the Protector's Hand at Sir G. Kneller's: For that is too gross, even for a common Picture. But what think you of his own Head on one Side, and Twelve Lords on the Reverse? Or since all other Societies have taken their *Motto's* from the Old World, suppose he fetch'd one from the New; and clapp'd his own Face upon the Frontispiece, with this Word on the Reverse, written in Cyphers, *THE SOUTH-SEA*.

I have but one or two Objections to the Statutes in *France*, which I cannot get over. One is, they must not meddle with Matters of Religion. This might have very ill Consequences, and hinder their Top Wit from shewing his Talents: I mean that Orthodox Divine, who it is well known was never half so witty upon any other Subject, as upon that of Religion. Another Law of theirs that gives me Offence, is, The Law by which they are oblig'd to

to judge of no-body's Works but their own. For perhaps our Academy may not be in a Humour to write any Thing these Hundred Years, except a Trifle now and then, as an *Examiner*, a *Conduct*, a *John Bull*, or so. All which Works are allowable, because the *French Statute* says, *Political Matters may be treated of conformably to the Authority of the State*.

There was one Rule more among the *French Academicians*, that will never do in *England*, which is their forbidding the Academy's Certificate to be printed before the Writings of the Members, and allowing 'em only to put, *Par un tel de l' Academie Francoise*; As if one should say, *By such a Person of the British Academy*. This would make mad Work here: Every little *Grubstreet* Scribler would presently be publishing his *Trash*, with the stolen Title of *My Lord such a one, or Brigadier such a one, of the British Academy*. And how should we be able to distinguish the Right from the Wrong, unless their License be printed before in Form, like a *Privilege Royal*, *To our Trusty and Well-beloved Abel Roper, of London, Bookseller*.

Having just mention'd *Abel*, it puts me in Mind of a certain Officer belonging to the *French Academy*, call'd a *Li-*

a Library-Keeper. This was given to one *Camusat*, the most Eminent Bookseller then in *Paris*: And I presume nobody will say that Trusty *Abel* is not the fittest Man in *England* for that Office: He being supposed not only to have printed, but even to have father'd some considerable Works of the most Elegant of all our Academicians.

There's nothing else very remarkable in the Laws of the *French Academy*, except their forbidding any Member to write in their Defence, which it is probable will be thought worth observing here. For if our Society should pretend to answer every impertinent Thing that will be written against them, they would be finely set to Work. If therefore they should happen to be daily pelted at, the shortest way will be to despise their Opponents, and to consider themselves as Persons above the Reach of Malice; incorporated under a glorious Protector for some good End or other; and in daily Expectation of having a Charter and an Act of Parliament to back them; and of being made Wits by the Laws of the Land.

I cannot conclude without observing how pat every Thing happens: The *French Society* met on *Thurſdays*. So the News tells

tells us, the *English* do ; with this good difference: The *French* met after they had din'd. The *English*, they say, dine together, and drink a chearful Glass afterwards; which has great Efficacy in Matters of Wit and Eloquence, as well for those that are to write, as those that are to reward. Wine is therefore call'd *Generous*, and is as nearly ally'd to Wit, as Wit is to Madnes. How much wittier are some Men over the third Bottle than over the first ! A strong Reason that the Meeting should be at a Tavern, and not any private House, which the *French* Academy found very inconvenient; for whenever the Members, at whose Houses they met, took a Fancy to Marry, their Wives turn'd the Wits out of Doors; as it happen'd in the Case of Monsieur *Conrart* and some others. Thus they were driven from one place to another, till their Protector got them a Room in the King's own Palace; which cannot conveniently be done in *England* whilst Lodgings are so scarce: And therefore I hope they will drink on as they do, till *Whitehall* is rebuilt. And here I will leave them for the present: When their two other Members are chosen, it may perhaps be not unseasonable to acquaint the Publick with the further

further Progress of this hopeful Society; and to shew all the World how far we not only imitate or copy, but even excel our Friends the French. In the mean time, I hope, some of their best Writers will be order'd to give us a short Touch or Essay of their Eloquence, upon our late Glorious Enterprize against the French, on Tuesday the 20th of this present May, under the Command of his Grace the D. of Orm--d.

F I N I S.

